



Voices from the Gaps **Vg**

Edwidge Danticat

“

When you write, it's like braiding your hair. Taking a handful of coarse unruly strands and attempting to bring them to unity . . . Some of the braids are long, others are short. Some are thick, others are thin. Some are heavy. Others are light.

— Krik? Krak!

”



Biography

Edwidge Danticat has been writing ever since she was a small girl of nine. While her parents thought that writing would never be more than a hobby for her and urged her to pursue another career, Danticat proved them wrong. At the age of twenty-six, in 1995, she became a finalist for the National Book Award for *Krik? Krak!* Danticat, drawing on her experiences as a Haitian-American, writes of one of the most underrepresented cultures in American literature using a style which is both poetic and passionate. Having also received the 1995 Pushcart Short Story Prize and fiction awards from *The Caribbean Writer*, *Seventeen*, and *Essence* magazines, she is now widely considered to be one of the most talented young authors in the United States.

Quick Facts

- * Born in 1969
- * Haitian-born author, immigrated to the United States at age 12
- * First published work was *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

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Edwidge Danticat

Biography continued

Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 1969. Because her parents immigrated to New York when she was very young, Danticat was raised by an aunt whom she loved dearly. It was during these early years that Danticat was influenced by the Haitian practice of story-telling which developed because much of the population was not literate at the time. Danticat says that the memories of Haiti are still extremely vivid in her mind, and that her love of Haiti and things Haitian deeply influences her writing.

At the age of twelve, Danticat joined her parents in Brooklyn. During her high school years, Danticat rarely spoke loudly, if at all, because she was shy. Although at first she was teased at school because of her accent, Danticat has always been proud of her origin. During difficult times, she found support from her family and the Haitian community in Brooklyn. Haitian Creole eventually proved to be an asset in her writing of fiction, as it adds a freshness to her use of the English language.

When Edwidge Danticat received a BA in French literature from Barnard College, she fulfilled her parents' desire that she be successful in spite of, or because, she is an immigrant. Danticat's education, however, did not stop there. She went on to complete her Master of Fine Arts degree at Brown University, where, as her thesis, she wrote *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (Soho Press, 1994). This novel speaks of four generations of Haitian women who must overcome their poverty and powerlessness. Danticat also explores some disturbing familial traditions -- most importantly the rural practice of "testing" a daughter to confirm that she is still a virgin. According to Danticat, some middle-class Haitian-American women who consider themselves liberated voiced much opposition to the novel. Many were ashamed of "testing" or shocked to learn that it even exists. Danticat, however, underlines the fact that she does not consider herself to be the representative of all Haitian Americans.

In 1995, *Krik? Krak!* (Soho Press), a collection of short stories about Haiti and Haitian Americans before democracy, was published as Danticat's second book. In an interview for NPR, Danticat said this of her book: "I wanted to raise the voice of a lot of the people that I knew growing up, and this was, for the most part, . . . poor people who had extraordinary dreams but also very amazing obstacles." These stories receive their title from the Haitian tradition of the storyteller calling out "Krik?" and willing listeners gathering around and answering "Kraak." Danticat has finally, and beautifully, written down the Haitian tradition.

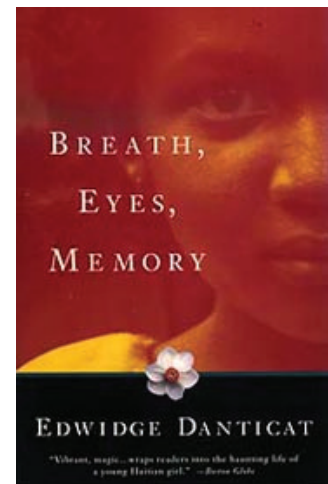


Edwidge Danticat

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Edwidge Danticat

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Edwidge Danticat

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